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INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4463
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1525
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1439
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3544
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA 0112
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1088
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1992
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

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TAGS: PGOV PINS ASEC ID

SUBJECT: NORTH MALUKU -- ELECTION SPARKS CONCERN ABOUT
COMMUNAL TENSIONS

REF: JAKARTA 3089

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Surabaya.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: North Maluku Province in eastern Indonesia continues to await final results from its first-ever direct gubernatorial election. The local electoral commission has announced that it will not release final results until next week. The situation remains calm, but a confrontation between supporters of the two leading candidates--who come from rival ethnic groups--remains a concern. A heavy security force presence--and a local hereditary ruler who is not taking sides--are providing some ballast in a fluid situation. END SUMMARY.

NO FINAL RESULT YET

¶3. (C) North Maluku Province--located in Eastern Indonesia, southeast of Mindanao--is still waiting on the results of its first-ever direct gubernatorial election conducted on November 3 (see ref A for background on election day). The latest data from the local electoral commission (KPUD) shows incumbent governor, Thaib Armayin, who is backed by the Democratic Party and the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party, to be ahead. Abdul Gafur, the Golkar party candidate, is trailing, and he has accused KPUD of manipulating the data. The situation has been complicated by the conduct of various quick counts, some of which support the KPUD data, and some of which support Gafur. In order to ease tensions, KPUD on November 7 announced that it would no longer make data available until November 13 when it would release the final calculation.

COMMUNAL DISHARMONY

¶4. (C) With the result delayed, tensions are rising between two key ethnic groups, the Makian and the Tidore (there is no religious distinction between the two groups, which are both mostly Muslim). This is not the first time Gafur, an ethnic

Tidore, has seen victory apparently slip from his grasp. In 2002, he was selected to be governor by the local assembly (DPRD). The result was later overturned because of alleged money politics, and Thaib, an ethnic Makian, was installed instead. Since then the Makian group, which accounts for approximately 30 percent of the provincial population, has come to dominate the local government bureaucracy, which has caused resentment among other ethnic groups. North Maluku, unfortunately, has a history of ethnic tension--violence in the 1999-2001 timeframe left thousands dead.

¶ 15. (C) Ethnic tensions in North Maluku are also strained over another issue. According to Chris Wilson, an Australian academic, the greatest issue dividing the candidates is over the location of the provincial capital. Under the law that established North Maluku as a province, the capital was supposed to be relocated from Ternate to Central Halmahera as part of a compromise. Gafur has said that if elected he would relocate the capital within a week, a position strongly favored by ethnic Tidore, who comprise roughly 15 percent of the population. Thaib says he will hold his inauguration ceremony in the new capital if he wins, but political observers note that Thaib, whose supporters are entrenched in Ternate, has had five years to move the capital without doing so.

TRYING TO KEEP A LID ON IT

¶ 16. (C) Despite the tension surrounding the vote tabulation, an enhanced police presence has worked to secure the streets and the situation is now calm. Abdi Dharma, the deputy provincial police chief (he is not from the area), told poloff that he was surprised by the strength of ethnic identity in the province and that managing the ethnic tensions were his greatest election-related challenge.

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¶ 17. (C) The Sultan of Ternate, a hereditary ruler who sits in the national legislature, is also helping keep a lid on the situation. He told us that he would not back either Gafur or Thaib, or otherwise get involved in the situation. The Sultan continues to command strong support in Ternate and among minority groups in North Halmahera. Keeping the forces of traditional authority out of the present squabble is helpful to police in their efforts to safeguard North Maluku's peace and stability. Police are also working closely with the military to keep the Sultan's supporters, the Pasukan Adat, inside the palace walls. In August, the Pasukan Adat clashed with police, after the Sultan was barred from competing in the gubernatorial contest because he lacked the requisite 15% party support within the DPRD (ref B).

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